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ABSTRACT

This keynote address first briefly reviews the historical nature and structure of education in Zimbabwe prior to independence. Then, the theme of the seminar (integrated education as a preparation for social development), as well as related policy issues are stated. Educational goals of the government of Zimbabwe are discussed. Concluding remarks point out the contributions of the Bernard van Leer Foundation to the welfare of disadvantaged children in Zimbabwe. (Author/RH)

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BERNARD VAN LEER FOUNDATION

Second Eastern Hemisphere Seminar

(Salisbury, Zimbabwe, 24 February - 7 March 1981)

INTEGRATED AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: PREPARATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Keynote Address, the Hon. Mrs. Victoria Chitepo
Deputy Minister of Information and Tourism

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Mr. Chairman, Hounourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I come here to speak to you today, and for a number of reasons.

First, the proper education of the youth of our nation is clearly a foremost priority in a new state such as ours, particularly when so many undesirable trappings of the past have to be dismantled.

Second, I have read with great interest and appreciation about all the remarkable work which the Bernard van Leer Foundation is accomplishing throughout the world and I feel we are indeed privileged to act as host for such a significant seminar.

Third, as an educationist and a mother of six children myself, I am keenly aware of the supreme importance of laying the right educational foundation on which any young life may be constructed; in fact, I believe that without that initial base in the early years, the whole edifice may in time crumble and fall.

Before embarking on the subject of today's seminar, it is perhaps necessary that I take a quick glance at the historical nature and structure of education in this country prior to independence.

Under colonialism, education was designed to be consistent with the values and interests of the colonizers. This was indeed the case in the then Southern Rhodesia. The educational system was consciously designed in such a way that it would evolve strictly as an integral part of a minority settler society and for the manifest purpose of both serving and consolidating that society.

The bulk of the responsibility for African education was left to missionary societies. By the close of the 19th Century, at least ten different denominational groups had been granted substantial tracts of land by the BSA Company to set up their missions. In 1899, the Company, then responsible for the running of the country's affairs, issued the Educational Ordinance No. 18, laying the foundation for a dual system of education divided along racial lines. The Ordinance clearly distinguished between the type of education for the African child and that to be given to the white child. The latter was to receive an education infinitely superior to that given to the

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former. This racially segregated system of education was to be observed by all schools, regardless of whether they were mission schools, Government schools or otherwise.

With the advent of self-government status for the Colony, in 1923, concerted efforts were made to consolidate this racially dichotomous educational system. Subsequent to that, a separate department of Native Education was set up. This segregated educational system was further reinforced by the passage of the Land Apportionment Act, in 1930. Since then, the African suffered an inferior educational system as well as inadequate facilities.

During the period of UDI, the Ian Smith regime sought to strengthen walls of segregation in education through its "Bantustanization" policy, referred to as the plan for African Education, introduced in 1966. The plan gave the illusion of increased Government interest in African education at the various pre-University levels - primary, secondary and vocational. In reality, however, it reaffirmed the regime's declared belief in the inferiority of the African: in spite of the fact that the school-age population of the African was at least 20 times larger, *per capita* expenditure for the African population was less than five per cent that for the non-African population.

The racial dualism in the educational system, along with economic dualism, served to compartmentalize the Rhodesian society into two distinct, unequal and hostile racial groups. It is this social character and the determined desire of the African majority to change it, that gave rise to and explains the prolonged political struggle which ultimately found expression in armed confrontation for national independence.

Ours was, therefore, a struggle, not for its own sake, but for the noble objective of creating a new society characterized by social and economic justice. The decision to resort to armed struggle was difficult but inescapable. Our Prime Minister has so eloquently argued:

> If the minority white community were to be transformed into non-racialists and cease to be masters and to enjoy the exclusive monopoly of wealth and control over the country's natural resources, and if the blacks were to cease to be racial inferiors, emerge from the status of impoverished peasants and workers, and begin to enjoy an equitable distribution of wealth and ownership of the country's resources and means of production, we reasoned as revolutionary nationalist leaders that only a national armed struggle could do it. (Prime Minister's address to the Zimbabwe Economic Society, 8 September 1980.)

Our struggle cannot, therefore, limit itself to national independence as an objective; it must be a struggle to decolonize our history; to put the past in its proper Afro-centric perspective; to education to create a new mentality, a new man with a positive view of himself individually and collectively.

Our revolutionary struggle cannot be said to be complete until it has transformed the mental and material situation of the individual - until independence itself can be translated in human terms. Liberation must become a human phenomenon. This means the individual must be actively involved in the continuous life-affirming process of liberation. He must not be told about it, he must live it, it must become an inextricable part of his existential experience. He must internalize the value of liberation in terms of it being synonymous with life itself. This will at once raise his consciousness to new heights and render his involvement or participation in the process of change committed. It will motivate him to aspire to new horizons in life. It will enable him to rethink and re-define life.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme of this seminar which concentrates on integrated education as a preparation for social development, is one which educationists, psychologists and sociologists are turning to with greater frequency. Research and experimental studies to date have revealed that, central to the child's development are: language, culture, environmental influences and social interaction. It is also worth noting that the most interesting experiments in the latter have either been very loosely linked to theory, or quite unconnected with theory. This would seem to indicate that theorizing in the field of integrated learning as a basis for social development is premature, because such theories tend to have been constructed before the basic empirical phenomena were discovered.

What is needed first, therefore, is a working picture of what is happening in educative-social situations. This is precisely the opportunity that this seminar presents us with: an opportunity to construct a working picture of the realities, and to make progress from this point. In this context, the first reality is surely that education must be concerned with the total development of the child. Therefore, integrated education by definition must include the family, the home, the school and the community - all sharing the responsibility for educating the child. The home, the school and the community should therefore move closer together so that each complements the role of the others, using the best aspects of each to promote the child's development. These aspects can no longer be separated. Each must understand and respect the contribution of the other. Only when this is achieved, can education be seen as a totality - an integrated education.

The second reality is that early childhood education begins in the home - the home being the pivotal point from which all further developments stem. Education does not start, as is widely accepted, when formal nursery schooling or pre-school groups are initiated, where the children are divorced from parents and home. This practice has predominated for far too long. Integrated early education in any form must include the parents and the home in order to provide a total educative environment.

The third reality that faces education is that it must offer each child positive and substantial opportunities for social development. Educational policies can no longer afford to concentrate purely on academic schooling but must offer the life opportunities for individuals to develop personal qualities, character, integrity, a sense of involvement with the family, with the community at large and a sense of responsibility to all these people. Education for social development recognizes the need for a

holistic approach in which all are involved from the cradle to the grave.

A holistic approach to education is of vital importance to countries in the Eastern Hemisphere. Many countries in this Hemisphere are in the process of identifying and developing their own sense of direction, politically, culturally, economically and socially. These countries are therefore facing the need to establish a fully educated populace, confident in their abilities to be productive members of self-sufficient states. In this struggle to achieve self-sufficiency and productivity, many Eastern Hemisphere countries face the awesome problems of poverty, ignorance and disease. These situations are frequently exacerbated by limited financial and other resources, such as trained personnel. This occasion affords a unique opportunity for Eastern Hemisphere countries, including Zimbabwe, to identify their problems and jointly to find solutions to them. The enormous task of education in this world context is therefore to devise and provide an education system that will ultimately offer freedom from the constraints of poverty, ignorance and disease and which can and will offer a better life for the young.

When we speak of the young, our children and the needs of our children for their welfare and development, we are reminded of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1959. The full recognition of the need to declare safeguards and children's rights was unequivocally announced in this declaration. In ten carefully worded principles, this declaration affirms the rights of children to enjoy special protection and to be given opportunities and facilities to enable then to develop in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.

In making this declaration, the nations of the world accepted the responsibility for the promotion of these rights and called upon all men and women of conscience, voluntary organizations, local authorities, governments and international agencies to accept and recognize the rights of the child and to strive for their observance by legislative and all other means thought to be necessary to safeguard them.

The Government of Zimbabwe has made it abundantly clear that it is firmly dedicated to the principles of the declaration. In less than a year in office, unjust and discriminating legislation has been dismantled. For example: legislation which made inordinate provisions for the establishment and Government maintenance of élitist schools, reserved exclusively for the minority white population, has been abolished, together with the macabre ruling that children of different races may not engage in sporting activities together. Free primary education is now available to any child, access to secondary education has increased by three hundred per cent and free health care is available to those who could not otherwise afford this service.

It is the intention of the Zimbabwe Government to create in all our schools the necessary conditions which will facilitate the free mingling and interchange of children without regard to race, colour or creed but simply as Zimbabweans, united in a common identity. To this end, much progress has already taken place in our schools and is gathering momentum. Another major concern of the Government is the revision of the curricula, so that all children throughout the educational system will study from the same syllabus,

leading to the realization of shared aspirations, which exclude no child from the opportunity of fulfilling these.

Up until 1978, completely separate Ministries of African and European Education were enforced, with separate administrators and professional staffs, which meant that children studied different curricula. This separate curricula structure is also in the process of being dismantled. New syllabuses at the primary stage are already under trial in all schools and the same process is in operation at secondary-school level.

The integration of schools and school curricula is well in hand. The children of Zimbabwe, whatever their colour, must grow within the same frame of reference on the basis of a common curriculum at all stages in their schooling. This will provide the necessary prompting for a truly integrated, non-racial society in our country. It is my belief that Zimbabwe has the necessary ingredients and expertise and will transcend the racial hostilities of the past and establish a harmonious non-racial society. The odds may be great, but our determination to surmount them is even greater. This determination will remain foremost in our endeavours until every form of discrimination has been eradicated. As an example of this determination, legislation is now in progress to abolish the so-called community schools, set up hastily and crudely by the previous regimes in order to perpetuate a last bastion of racial exclusiveness for whites. New legislation being enacted in Parliament this month will, apart from anything else, prevent any further white children from being subjected to the unenlightened and frighteningly exclusive world of racism, the consequences of which can be both evil and tragic.

Moreover, the Government of Zimbabwe has pledged itself to make available the expertise and resources needed to accelerate progress towards offering its children opportunities for developing in an atmosphere of freedom, in which educational institutions are no longer retained exclusively for either ethnic or socio-economic reasons. This new atmosphere of freedom offers a more hopeful future through the opportunity to develop potential, realize aspirations and accept the responsibilities of citizenship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important to note that the process of social and economic integration cannot take place in a cultural vacuum. Educational innovations, economic development, technical know-how must take place within the context of and be influenced by cultural systems and values. In Zimbabwe, there have existed two distinct cultures, side by side. Because of the racialist policies pursued throughout the period of colonialism, these two cultural components have not always co-existed in harmony. The colonial regimes always pursued a policy that would make the white culture the dominant one to the extent that the degree of an African's acceptability into the white society depended on the degree to which he had internalized and emulated white cultural values and behavioural norms. On the contrary, there was no attempt on the part of the white society to appreciate, let alone internalize, African cultural values.

It is this dichotomous cultural milieu that the new Zimbabwe seeks to correct. Without attempting to deny the right of a people to value and live by their cultural norms, we intend to develop the type of social integration which would not only preserve the best in the various cultures but

would enable the people of one culture to appreciate and respect the cultural norms of another segment of the society.

I believe that education is among the most effective channels to utilize in the pursuit of such an objective. The white children in Zimbabwe must learn to appreciate the cultural base of the Zimbabwe people as a whole. This is equally true for the African and Asian child.

The physical and cultural distance that has been developed and honoured since the onset of colonialism must be done away with. There must be a mutually enriching cross-fertilization of cultures. For me, a comprehensive integrated child education in our society must be cross-cultural in character. Further, I believe that this approach to education will provide for us the strong base we need for a socially integrated society in Zimbabwe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for Zimbabwe, the Bernard van Leer Foundation is no stranger in promoting the welfare of children, particularly disadvantaged children. The Foundation is intimately concerned with the education of these children and with the training of the young and of adults. At present it is funding and promoting an early learning centre at St. Mary's, Zengeza, for pre-school children, and the Hlekweni Training Centre, for school-leavers near Bulawayo.

Both of these projects, and in particular the Early Learning Centre at St. Mary's, play a much greater role in the community and the country than would appear to be the case at first glance. The latter, of course, gives exceptional opportunities to the 180 children who are enrolled at any one time in the nursery school units and to the many other children who attend playgroups at the Centre. But in addition, the parents of the pupils come to know more about their own children and how to provide for their developing needs. The para-professionals programme has given training to substantial numbers of local women, so that they in turn can take their new knowledge and skills not only into their own homes and those of friends and neighbours, but also into playgroups and community child-care projects.

A third programme brings local mothers and their children, telling stories, making colourful and imaginative but inexpensive playthings for them, and so on. As you will see, the real purpose of early childhood education, as seen in the St. Mary's project, is not so much the enrichment of the lives of relatively few children, but the education of parents and communities into the ways in which (in addition to the love and devotion which is all important and comes naturally) they can give their children an even better chance to prepare themselves for their schooling and, ultimately, their adult lives.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation has, therefore, made a lasting, significant contribution in Zimbabwe. The long-term social, moral and economic progress of our country will depend, to a great extent, on the way we can prepare our youth for the world in which they will grow. We realize that the years of early childhood are vital in this task. We also realize that the greatest influence in this direction is obtained, especially in a rapidly expanding and developing country such as Zimbabwe, by helping parents together with their children. In doing this, there is the additional benefit in that the families concerned become more united and stable - a reversal of world trends.

At present in Zimbabwe, pre-school activities have expanded with such rapidity that it can be categorically stated that there is a nationwide demand for training and facilities to meet the enormous growth of pre-school centres, especially in the rural areas. For example, in a recent nationwide survey conducted in Zimbabwe in February this year, a minimum of 796 pre-school centres were identified. This survey was by no means exhaustive and the possibility of many more cannot be discounted. Of these 796 centres 463 are in the rural areas and the remaining 340 in urban areas. The enrolment per centre is on average 75 children, with some centres having less than 20 children and others as many as 258 in one centre. The latter figure is possible in rural areas, where centres operate out of doors and therefore overcrowding does not exist. The majority of these centres are attached to primary schools. However, whereas in the past these groups could have their own classrooms, the introduction of free primary education and the subsequent increases in enrolment, have meant that most rural centres are forced to make do with grass shelters, churches, council halls, or under trees when it is not raining. The very meagre play equipment, characteristic of rural play centres, is a further reflection of the inadequacy of facilities; unlike their urban counterparts, rural centres cannot rely on even so-called junk which might be improvised. Consequently, in the absence of toys and equipment, the supervisors' imagination is taxed and the programmes tend to be monotonous.

This address would be incomplete without the mention of the refugee problem we face in Zimbabwe. We have 14,000 refugee children in boarding schools around the country. For those refugee children who have no homes to return to or no possibilities for schooling in their home areas, the Government has plans to establish schools with boarding facilities, each accommodating over 1,000 primary-school pupils. In addition to their formal education, children will learn by doing; assisting in the construction of buildings, acquiring agricultural and other skills. In this deviation from the past when education was purely academic, we want to integrate theory and practice as a guiding policy for the future of our education system. The introduction of productive activities into the life and time-table of schools will be the cornerstone of this objective. It is our firm belief that the combination of productive work and study is a first and vital step towards linking education and life and development in reality.

The liberation war evolved a new ideology and thinking on the future development of Zimbabwe. The youth of this country, some former combatants, others participants in one way or the other, are now at the threshold of joining in that development.

Our philosophy is based on socio-economic considerations of a socialist value system, with equality of opportunity and collective self-reliance as an important goal. The socialist ethos demands an educational system which produces men and women who are not only economically productive, but men and women, able and willing to contribute positively at all levels to their community and society.